

**Private Sector Forum on regional integration in West Africa
(Accra, Ghana, October 23-24, 2002)**

Conclusions of the Forum

From October 23 to 24, 2002, was held in Accra (Ghana) a Private Sector Forum on regional integration in West Africa, initiated by WAEN (West Africa Enterprise Network), ABR (African Business Roundtable), ECOWAS, WAEMU, the World Bank, USAID and CIDA.

The Forum was attended by almost 150 participants.

At the opening ceremony, the Forum heard addresses by Mr Mohammed Ibn Chambas, Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, read by Mr Frank Ofei, Director at ECOWAS, by Mr Abdou Seyni, WAEMU representative, by Mrs. Marie-Françoise Marie Nelly, World Bank representative and by Al Hadj Bamanga Tukur, President of the African Business Roundtable (ABR). They all insisted on the necessity that businesswomen and businessmen in West Africa should seize the opportunities provided by an increased regional integration, relieved of the multiple constraints hampering its achievement.

The first plenary session, chaired by Mr Mansour Cama, president of Senegal employers' co-ordination, then gathered the panelists around the theme of Private sector's vision for regional integration. Three exposés were presented on the conditions of a successful West African insertion into world economy by 2020 (a text prepared by Dr Alioune SALL, Director of Futures Africa and presented by Mr Alioune Diagne, Cabinet Adira, Senegal) and on the role expected from the private sector to this end (by Dr Mrs Bola Kuforiji, former Minister of Commerce of Nigeria, and by Mr Mor Talla Kane, Cabinet Adira). A few sub-regional businesses renowned as being « Success Stories », Ecobank (represented by Mr Fogan Sossah), Data Bank (represented by Mr Ken Ofori-Atta) and Pharmacie (represented by Mr Gérard Mangoua), also presented their experiences and pointed out the key-factors on which their achievements were based.

The second plenary session, chaired by Chief Mrs. Nike Akande, former Minister of Industry of Nigeria and Chairwoman of International Development Corporation, heard three presentations on non-competitive factors in West Africa (by Mr Albert Zeufack of the World Bank), on the role regional integration could play for the removal of the administrative barriers to investment in West Africa (by Mr Jacques Morisset of the World Bank) and on commercial information as a tool for the promotion of regional integration (by Mr Moubarack LO, Cabinet Adira).

The forum participants then split into seven sector workshops as follows:

- Food industry workshop: (Moderator: Mansour CAMA, Chairman PFS Senegal; Panelists: Chris Foli, Norpalm Ghana; Rui Ribeiro, Bissau Guinea; Boureïma Wonkoye, Niger)
The session was introduced by Mr Wallace Tyner, Abt associates, USA

- Bank/ finance/insurance workshop (Moderator: Chief Rufus Giwa (Executive Vice-President, ABR, Nigeria); Panelists: Stéphane Carrère, Permanent Secretary, Group Bank of Africa; Ken Ofori-Atta, CEO, DataBank, Ghana; Fogan Sossah, Managing Director, Ecobank Côte d'Ivoire.
The session was introduced by Alioune Diagne, Adira s.a., Senegal
- SME-women entrepreneurship-informal sector workshop (Moderator: Mrs Abiola Dosumu, Chairwoman of Superwomen Nigeria Ltd, Nigeria; Panelists: Xavier Bakyono, Director, Afric Audit, Burkina Faso; Mrs. Mara Makélé Traoré, CEO, SBI, Guinea; Maja Sonko, Sonko Jileng Enterprise, the Gambia.
The session was introduced by Mr Cheikh Oumar TALL, Adira s.a., Senegal
- Telecom/NICT workshop (Moderator: Network Computer Systems Ltd., Ghana); Panelists: Tidiane SARR, Net Wyz, Senegal; Jean-Marie Noagbodji , CEO, Café Informatique, Togo.
The session was introduced by Mr Moubarack LO, Adira s.a., Senegal
- Transport/logistics/distribution workshop (Moderator: Marcel Nikiéma , Chairman Translog, Burkina Faso); Panelists: Siélé Silué, World Bank ; Dr Babajimi Olusola, CEO, Ecoair, Nigeria ;
The session was introduced by Mr Babacar Diop, Adira s.a., Senegal
- Tourism workshop: Moderator :Charles Ukomadu, Secrétaire General of the Association of tourist professionals, Nigeria; Panelists: Djibril Tabouré, DG, ATS Travel Agency, Mali; James Owusu-Bonsu, Vanef Ltd.
The session was introduced by a document prepared by the World Bank and presented by Mr Mor Talla Kane, Adira s.a., Senegal
- Textile workshop: Moderator: Gilles Moisan, GTP Group, Ghana; Panelists: Mrs. Aïssatou Edith Dionne, ADT, Senegal; Etubi , AREWA TEXTILES LTD, Nigeria; Ibrahima FALL, CEO NSTS Senegal.
The session was introduced by Mr Charles Krakoff, Abt Associates, USA

Each workshop reviewed the specific constraints affecting the various sectors and proposed remedial measures.

At the close of the Forum, participants adopted the following conclusions:

1. The Forum considered that, in the new context of globalization, regional integration is a necessity both for African economies and economic operators in the continent to develop the sole critical mass capable of withstanding international competition. Moreover, regional level is a framework of apprenticeship and testing for African private sector prior to set in on international markets.
2. The Forum greeted the commitment of Heads of State and Governments to have the integration process go forward in Africa with the recent creation of the African Union and NEPAD (New Partnership for African Development), as well as in West Africa with the boosting activities of ECOWAS and WAEMU.

3. It is indispensable that the Private sector be involved in the regional integration of West Africa. This is why the Forum set itself the objective of specifying concrete modalities of the Private sector role in the process.
4. The prerequisite and first stage for a successful regional integration is the promotion of peace, security and good governance in the sub-region. The private sector believes that it has a part to play in this view and vividly wishes to be co-opted as an observer in regional instances of conflict resolution.
5. In order to have integration actually progress in West Africa, it is also important to raise all barriers to its advance towards this objective, including those relating to administrative procedures as well as to non-competitive factors in West Africa. It is in this prospect that the Forum recommended the creation of an ***Observatory of international competitiveness in West Africa*** and invited ECOWAS, WAEMU, the World Bank and other development partners to study, in relation with regional private sector organizations (ABR and WAEN among others), the modalities of its implementation in the best possible delays.
6. Considering the role of trade information as a tool for the promotion of regional integration, the Forum recommended the creation of a regional integrated network of trade information, jointly managed by ECOWAS, WAEMU, the States of the sub-region and private sector organizations on the basis of new information technologies.

7. At the sector level, the Forum recommended:

For the food industry sector:

- develop access to information (promotion of economic and trade information networks)
- at the sub-regional level, a rationalized support to entrepreneurship and business development (financing, private saving mobilization, infrastructure development and reduced factor costs, etc.) ;
- capacity building through human resource training and research promotion: creation of sub-region-oriented technical food-industry centres., dissemination of research results, etc.;
- quality promotion (support to production, labelling, ...)
- select some related sectors to be thoroughly studied in order to contemplate development programmes at the sub-regional scale: dairy/meat/leather; fishing; fruit and vegetable; oil-seeds; cotton .

For the sector of Information and Communication Technologies

- organize in the best possible delays a summit of State highest decision-makers in West Africa on Information and communication Technologies with a view to defining a regional vision and clear and concrete national visions for ICT development, with a close association of the private sector. This vision will then be translated into operational action plans. ECOWAS and WAEMU should closely co-ordinate their actions to this end;

- harmonize the legal framework of ICT sector in West Africa through a common code of conducts with regulatory enactment, and institute in all countries independent regulatory authorities;
- suppress taxes on ICT equipment persisting in certain ECOWAS countries;
- create a regional association of ICT professionals;
- implement incubating pilot-projects in the sub-region and ICT-oriented risk capital funds;
- create a regional centre of excellency for training to ICT professions within the framework of a partnership involving sub-regional institutions, the States and the private sector;
- encourage specialized firms, through tax incentives notably, to develop free training for youth.

For the tourist sector

- adopt a common code of investment sufficiently favourable to make the sector more attractive to investors;
- contemplate the short-term creation of regional centres for training of tourist professionals;
- make up for the negative image of West Africa conveyed by the media;
- encourage promotion activities at the regional level;
- organize a joint representation of the region countries in tourist providing countries;
- promote partnerships between private operators in the region;
- encourage the creation of airline company with strong regional interests;
- organize in the best possible delays a regional meeting of the sector professionals with a view to creating a regional professional association.

For the transport/logistic sector

- at the regional level, update, harmonize and apply regulatory texts regarding transport
- accelerate the setting up of observatories of defaulting practices on corridors
- have governments get committed to complying with regulation relating to transport facilitation
- identify and build up regional-oriented network
- define a regional capacity building framework and regional criteria for the profession.

For the financial sector

- compile a list of all SME financing sources in the sub-region;
- create a supporting fund for rural and informal sector SME;
- promote cross-border financing of economic activities through the harmonized regulations and procedures, encouraging banks to open branches in several countries by inciting businesses to raise funds at the regional level;
- create a West African company of reinsurance;
- involve the West African Bank Association in the process of creation of a second monetary area and in the Forum follow-up.

For the SME/women entrepreneurship/informal sector

- create an Advisory and incubating centre for SMEs at the regional level. This centre could carry out sub-regional programmes of training and consultancy which would back-up national initiatives;
- set up a database on SMEs at ECOWAS and WAEMU levels;
- encourage the contribution of sub-regional institutions on risk capital, financing and guarantee to strengthen national financing policies;
- promote regional SME products through the organization of trade fairs and by raising constraints of access to regional markets;
- identify measures facilitating goods transit at the borders;
- secure an effective application of ECOWAS Protocoles;
- fully integrate female entrepreneurs to the regional integration process;
- at the sub-regional level, encourage consultations between judiciary, tax and customs administrations with a view to alleviating and harmonizing administrative formalities and procedures relating to SME creation and development.

For the textile sector

- develop a regional vision of textile industrialization: definition of policies and strategies for textile industrialization in the region;
- at the regional level, regulate second-hand clothes import;
 - widen OPICT scope (OPICT is the professional organization of cotton and textile industries in WAEMU countries), created in 2001, throughout all ECOWAS countries;
- Build OPICT capacities.

8. Follow-up modalities of the Forum

The Forum recommended:

- to set up a follow-up committee composed of representatives of the African Business Roundtable (ABR), the West Africa Enterprise Network (WEAN), ECOWAS, WAEMU, the World Bank, the Canadian Agency of International Development (CIDA), USAID, the European Union and OEDC / Sahel Club ;
- to integrate the recommendations of the Forum in the programmes and action plans of regional institutions, the States in the sub-region and development partners;
- to institutionalize the Private Sector Forum on regional integration in West Africa through an annual convening (at a fix period);
- to create a Web site on private sector/West African regional integration interaction.

Accra, October 24, 2002.